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La vie quotidienne des moines en Orient et en Occident (IV^e-X^e siècle)

Volume I

L'état des sources

Édité par

Olivier Delouis et Maria Mossakowska-Gaubert



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The Everyday Life of Monastic Communities in Anglo-Saxon England and the Germanic West up to 1000: the Literary Sources

THE area under study in this chapter includes the various kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England and the Germanic-speaking regions of the continent, which saw an extensive monastic culture between *ca* 600 and *ca* 1000. The continental regions, which were for the most part Christianised while under some degree of Frankish control or overlordship, can be broadly defined as Germany and the Low Countries between the Rhine and Elbe. In this chapter, for the sake of convenience, I shall follow common early medieval custom and refer to them collectively as Germania. At the start of our period, the Franks had already extended their intermittent rule over the formerly independent Germanic kingdoms of Alemannia, Bavaria and Thuringia; by the end of the eighth century they were also in effective control of Saxony and Frisia in the north. Most of these regions continued as stem duchies under the Ottonians in the tenth century. Anglo-Saxon England would remain a land of numerous kingdoms until its unification under a single king in the tenth century, a political process, which was also closely related to developments in English monastic culture.

The temporal limits of the chapter will stretch from the turn of the seventh century, which saw both the early Hiberno-Irish monastic foundations in Alemannia and the beginning of the Roman mission to Anglo-Saxon England, to the end of the tenth. Much of this period could be viewed as a single conversion narrative, an inevitable process of Christian expansion in which monastic communities of various types and traditions were the driving protagonists.¹ To a certain degree this would be justified, not least because the sources sometimes depict it in such a way: thus the Anglo-Saxon missionaries in Germania regarded themselves as the direct inheritors of the apostolic tradition of Augustine of Canterbury.² But we should also be aware that such grand retrospective narratives can hinder our deeper understanding of historical events. The process of conversion looks steady and inevitable only when viewed across the breadth of centuries. We must view each source in its particular context, and appreciate

1. The “story” of conversion forms one of the central historiographical narratives of post-Roman Europe. For general overviews, which follow this approach, see MARKUS 1990; BROWN 1992; VON PADBERG 1998; FLETCHER 1997; BROWN 2002; CARVER 2003.

2. See Boniface, *Epistolæ*, III, where Archbishop Cuthbert of Canterbury, immediately after Boniface’s martyrdom in 754, writes that the Anglo-Saxon church is to consider Boniface its special patron along with Gregory the Great and St Augustine, clearly placing Boniface’s work in Germania within the same apostolic tradition.

the conflict, uncertainty and frustrations inherent in all missionary enterprises, especially those, which attempt to maintain a regular monastic life throughout the process. However much trust a missionary may have placed in the eventual triumph of Christianity, he could never be sure of his place within it; and this was a crucial element in the everyday experiences of missionary monks.

Mission, furthermore, is merely part of the story. Most monks were not directly involved in preaching to pagans, although our literary and hagiographical sources are often concerned with those who were, or with those monks and nuns who were closely connected to them. After the initial conversion period in any given region there followed many decades and centuries of monastic development, which could be no less fraught with instability and conflict, as we shall see. These could derive from disputes over orthodoxy or authority, from a lack of resources, or from different attitudes towards discipline, episcopal demands on the lower clerical orders, the relationship between secular and religious power and the very nature of the monastic life itself. Conversion might end with baptism, but the “Christianisation” of society at large—which could mean very different things to different people—was an ongoing struggle, and one in which monks were often closely involved. Thus a great many of our sources deal with issues of reform and regulation, from the Frankish councils of the mid eighth century, to the reform efforts of Louis the Pious and Benedict of Aniane in the early ninth, to the similar Benedictine reforms in England in the mid to late tenth.

My aim in this chapter is to provide a broad overview of the various types of sources at the disposal of the monastic historian, followed by some remarks on the importance of missionary activity in the history of Anglo-Saxon and Germanic monastic development. The sources to be discussed include hagiography, letters, church councils and legislation, annals and chronicles. I will not discuss to any great extent the history of monastic rules in the Frankish territories, which is covered elsewhere in this volume.³ There are, as is to be expected, a great many gaps and silences in our sources, not to mention bias. Yet we are in the fortunate position that the most important texts have been subjected to intense historiographical study over the last century or more. The contexts of their creation and the prejudices of their authors are often fairly well understood, and many are readily available in critical editions.

1. HAGIOGRAPHY

The very value of hagiographical sources for our purpose—that they typically concerned monks or nuns, and were written usually by monks or nuns for a largely monastic audience—should provoke caution in their use as historical sources. The fundamental purpose of hagiography is to edify and instruct members of the church, and its portrayal of events is naturally guided by this aim, along with the other particular interests and biases of the author. Such texts tend to be formative, whether explicitly or implicitly; they often describe the monastic life as the author thought it should (or should not) be, rather than as it was. Thus while many

3. See the contribution of Anne-Marie HELVÉTIUS in this volume.

hagiographical texts do provide invaluable historical information concerning their subjects, their greatest virtue is perhaps the insight they allow into the beliefs and ideals of the audience for whom they were written.

The earliest hagiography pertaining to the lands east of the Rhine is Jonas of Bobbio's *Vita Columbani*, written ca 641/642, which describes St Columbanus's limited evangelisation of the Bregenz area. However, not until the second half of the eighth century was there a literary flourishing of hagiography in Germania, and this was in large part instigated by Anglo-Saxon missionaries who brought with them a strong hagiographical tradition from their homeland. We shall therefore proceed chronologically, considering the insular hagiography before we return to the continent.

Several hagiographical works date from late seventh- and early eighth-century England, the fruits of an extremely productive period in the early Anglo-Saxon church. The anonymous *Vita Cuthberti* was written at the Northumbrian monastery of Lindisfarne ca 699–705, celebrating the life of the hermit, abbot and bishop St Cuthbert.⁴ A few years later, some time in the 720s, the Venerable Bede wrote two new versions of the *Vita*, one in prose and one in verse, at the request of the Lindisfarne community.⁵ Stancliffe has observed the apparent Irish influences in the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti*, which presents Cuthbert as an inherently saintly figure from his birth to his death, with no real sense of a narrative progression or growth towards a higher state of sanctity—it is essentially a collection of local miracles written for a local audience, using what Cubitt describes as a 'snapshot method', dislocated in time but very firmly located in space.⁶ This Cuthbert is very much the traditional ascetic. Bede remains true to this image in his prose revision, but puts a much stronger didactic emphasis on certain episodes in the saint's life, his version being aimed at a broader monastic audience.⁷

Stephen of Ripon's *Vita Wilfridi*, written ca 712, relates the career of Wilfrid of Northumbria, one of the more enterprising and controversial figures of the early Anglo-Saxon church. The bishop and monastic founder Wilfrid was responsible, or at least took the credit, for championing the *Rule* of St Benedict in Northumbria, and was a strong supporter of Roman papal authority, travelling to Rome himself on more than one occasion. His ambitious and flamboyant character on occasion brought him into serious conflict with both royal and episcopal authority, not least because he was unwilling to surrender direct control of any of his own foundations, even when they fell within the diocese of another bishop.

Other Anglo-Saxon hagiography from this period includes the earliest surviving *Vita* of Pope Gregory the Great, written in Whitby between 704 and 714,⁸ Felix's *Vita Guthlaci*, written in Mercia or East Anglia during the 730s, Bede's *Historia abbatum*, concerning the abbots of his own monastery of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, and the anonymous *Vita Ceolfridi*. This last text, a biography of Abbot Ceolfrith of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, was probably also authored

4. *Vita sancti Cuthberti*.

5. Bede, *Vita sancti Cuthberti*; *idem*, *Vita sancti Cuthberti metrica*.

6. STANCLIFFE 1989, p. 25; CUBITT 2000, p. 39–41.

7. CUBITT 2000, p. 50.

8. *Vita Gregorii Magni*.

by Bede,⁹ whose *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* contains several further hagiographical treatments, notably of Cuthbert, King Oswald of Northumbria, abbess Hilda of Whitby and the Irish saint Fursey, who founded a hermitage in East Anglia in the 630s.¹⁰

We can return to the continent with St Boniface, the most famous and influential of the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon missionaries to Germania, who was martyred in Frisia in 754 and was the subject of a *Vita* written by Willibald of Mainz between 754 and 768. It has been noted that this *Vita* is unusually free of the most excessive hagiographical flourishings, recording only one miracle during Boniface's lifetime (the felling of the Oak of Jupiter at Geismar in 723), and avoiding any explicit partisanship regarding the contemporary dispute between Mainz and Fulda over Boniface's relics.¹¹

The next hundred years saw a series of *Vitæ* written within closely related literary circles east of the Rhine from Utrecht to Salzburg, as Ian Wood has explored.¹² Before 786 the nun Hygeburg of Heidenheim wrote the *Vitæ* of two brothers, Willibald and Wynnebald, followers and relatives of Boniface who became bishop of Eichstätt and founder of Heidenheim respectively.¹³ Other *Vitæ* from the Bonifatian circle include Eigil's *Vita Sturmi* concerning the founder of Fulda (written 794-800), Liudger's *Vita Gregorii* on the abbot of Utrecht (written 786-804),¹⁴ Rudolf of Fulda's *Vita Leobæ* on another of Boniface's relatives who became abbess of Tauberbischofheim (written in 836),¹⁵ and Lupus of Ferrières' *Vita Wigberti* on the abbot of Fritzlar (written in 836).¹⁶ Eigil († 822), the fourth abbot of Fulda, was memorialised in verse and prose accounts of his life by one of his pupils, Candidus Bruun, who did not shy away from depicting the severe internal conflicts among the Fulda community during the rule of Eigil's predecessor, the unpopular abbot Ratgar.¹⁷

Aside from the "Bonifatian" hagiography of central and northern Germania, a pair of *Vitæ* was also written by Bishop Arbeo of Freising in Bavaria shortly after Willibald's *Vita Bonifatii*, that is between 769 and 772. One concerns Emmeram of Regensburg († ca 652), the other Corbinian of Freising († ca 730), both of them venerated as founding saints by the eighth-century Bavarian church.¹⁸ It seems conceivable, given the date of composition, that they were written in response to the claims of Willibald's *Vita Bonifatii* that Boniface had fundamentally reformed the wayward Bavarians during the 740s. By exalting the achievements of pre-Bonifatian churchmen, Arbeo may have been hoping to assert the antiquity and independence of the bishoprics of Regensburg and Freising.¹⁹ The same might be said of the anonymous *Gesta Hrodberti*, which

9. Bede, *Vita sancti Ceolfridi*.

10. Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, IV. 27-32 (Cuthbert); III. 6, 9-13 (Oswald); IV. 23 (Hilda); III. 19 (Fursey).

11. WOOD 2001, p. 62-64.

12. *Ibidem*, p. 62-64.

13. Hygeburg of Heidenheim, *Vita Willibaldi*; *idem*, *Vita Wynnebalidi*.

14. Liudger, *Vita Gregorii abbatis Traiectensis*.

15. Rudolph of Fulda, *Vita Leobæ abbatissæ Biscofesheimensis*.

16. Lupus of Ferrières, *Vita Wigberti abbatis Friteslariensis*.

17. Candidus Bruun, *Vita Aegili* (verse); *idem*, *Sancti Egilis Vita* (prose).

18. Arbeo of Freising, *Vita Haimhrammi*; *idem*, *Vita Corbiniani*.

19. WOOD 2001, p. 157-158. See also COUSER 2010; DIESENBERGER 2012.

in its present form dates from the 790s but may have been based on an earlier version of the 740s, soon after Boniface's foundation of the bishopric of Salzburg in 739.²⁰ The subject of the *Vita* is Bishop Rupert of Worms († ca 712), who was invited by the ruling Duke of Bavaria to found a monastery in Salzburg long before Boniface's activity there. The Frankish saint and monastic founder Amandus († 675), who was very active as a missionary in Flanders, is the subject of the anonymous *Vita Amandi*, of uncertain date but probably composed in the eighth century and drawing on earlier written versions.

The Irish monk Kilian of Würzburg also inspired a late eighth-century *passio*.²¹ Its anonymous author appears to have modelled his brief narrative on Arbeo's *Vitae*, but was also very close to the Bonifatian circle—hardly surprising given both Würzburg's geographical location between Bavaria and Boniface's main mission field in central Germany, and the fact that Boniface founded one of his first bishoprics at Würzburg, the supposed site of Kilian's martyrdom and burial. Boniface's appointee at Würzburg, the Anglo-Saxon Burghard, was an active promoter of Kilian's cult, as the *Passio Kiliani* relates in its final chapter,²² and himself became the subject of a ninth-century *Vita*.²³

Further *Vitae* are more directly connected with the evangelisation of Frisia, Saxony and Denmark. Liudger's *Vita sancti Gregorii*, mentioned above, was probably written at Utrecht in what is now the Netherlands, and dealt at length with Boniface as well as his pupil Gregory. Towards the end of the eighth century Alcuin of York wrote a *Vita* of Willibrord († 739), an Anglo-Saxon whose Frisian mission offered Boniface his first experience of evangelisation, although Boniface later eclipsed him in importance and fame.²⁴ Some time during the ninth century, though its date of composition is uncertain and author unknown, the *Vita altera Bonifatii* was written, offering an alternative version of Boniface's life according to Utrecht tradition. Altfrid, Liudger's nephew and bishop of Münster, between 825 and 849 wrote a *vita* of his uncle, whose family was closely involved in the history of Frisia's conversion.²⁵ The anonymous *Vita sancti Willehadi* (written 840-855), the anonymous *Vita Lebuini antiqua* (mid ninth century to early tenth century), Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* (865-876) and the anonymous *Vita Rimberti* (after 888), are all concerned with missionary activity to northern Germania and the southern fringes of Scandinavia, although the last of the four shows rather more interest in monasticism in general.

As this rich tradition of hagiographical writing petered out east of the Rhine towards the end of the ninth century, there was a revival of the genre in England in the second half of the tenth century, which continued into the eleventh. In contrast to the surviving seventh- and eighth-century Anglo-Saxon hagiography, which was written in Northumbria and Mercia,

20. *Gesta sancti Hrodberti confessoris*. On dating, see WOOD 2001, p. 147-148.

21. *Passio Kiliani martyris Wirziburgensis*.

22. *Ibidem*, c. 15. Another of Boniface's first episcopal foundations, the abortive bishopric of Büraburg (founded in 742 and demoted ca 746), was preceded by a monastic community, which may also have been established by Kilian or his followers; see CLAY 2010.

23. *Vita sancti Burchardi*.

24. Alcuin of York, *Vita sancti Willibrordi*.

25. Altfrid, *Vita Liudgeri*.

the tenth century texts are mainly associated with Wessex, in particular with Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester († 984). Æthelwold was a leading figure of the tenth-century Benedictine revival in England, as we shall discuss further below, and used hagiography as a means of enhancing the prestige of the reformed Old Minster at Winchester. He commissioned the Frankish monk Lantfred to write an account of the translation of St Swithun, a ninth-century bishop of Winchester.²⁶ This *translatio* text, completed *ca* 975, was later reworked in verse form by Wulfstan Cantor, a pupil of Æthelwold who also composed a *Vita* of his master in the late 990s.²⁷ A *Passio* of St Eustace is associated with the community of Abingdon, a Benedictine re-foundation of Æthelwold,²⁸ and a verse *Vita* of the seventh-century Breton St Judoc was written in the late tenth century at Winchester's New Minster, which had acquired his relics *ca* 901.²⁹ Between 995 and 1005 the anonymous author B wrote a *Vita* of Archbishop Dunstan of Canterbury, another leader of the tenth-century reform.³⁰

A final flurry of insular hagiographical writing is connected to Ramsey in East Anglia, where Abbo of Fleury († 1004) sojourned between 985 and 987. While there he wrote a *Passio* of the martyred King Edmund of East Anglia.³¹ One of his Ramsey pupils, Byrhtferth († *ca* 1020) went on to write several pieces of hagiography, including a *Passio* of Æthelred and Æthelberht,³² the *Vita sancti Ecgwini* and the *Vita sancti Oswaldi*. St Oswald († 992), was bishop of Worcester and archbishop of York, and another central figure in the tenth-century English monastic reformation. Byrhtferth's lengthy and florid account of his life, written 997-1002, wastes no opportunity to present Oswald as the ideal Benedictine monk:

"Concerning his complete adherence to the monastic rule which Benedict, the saintly leader and revered glory of monks everywhere, produced superbly and established for this well-intentioned disciples to observe—as to how willingly, how devoutly and how honourably Oswald observed it, let the revered Wulfald say it, let 'the throng of monks say it', who are all faithful witnesses: that he was a true servant of God".³³

Byrhtferth was looking back on and glorifying the career of a pivotal figure in the tenth-century history of English monasticism. After his career there was a lull in the production of English hagiography until after the Norman Conquest, and thus the *Vita Oswaldi*, with its strong emphasis on the correct form of monastic life, is a suitable bookend for our examination of the hagiographical sources.

26. Lantfred of Winchester, *Translatio et miracula sancti Swithuni*.

27. Wulfstan Cantor, *Narratio metrica de Sancto Swithuno*; *idem*, *Vita sancti Æthelwoldi*.

28. See *Vita Eustachii*.

29. *Vita metrica s. Judoci*.

30. Author B, *Vita sancti Dunstani*.

31. Abbo of Fleury, *Passio sancti Eadmundi*.

32. Byrhtferth included the *Passio* of Æthelred and Æthelberht in his *Historia regum*, which itself survives only in the historical compilation of the same name by Symeon of Durham († *ca* 1129/1130).

33. Byrhtferth, *Vita sancti Oswaldi*, éd. LAPIDGE, p. 49.

There are four main early medieval letter collections, which pertain to some significant degree to Anglo-Saxon England and the regions east of the Rhine. First, there are the approximately 150 collected letters of St Boniface and Lul, which date from between 716 and 786; the standard critical edition is that of Michael Tangl from 1916, and the letters of Boniface (though not yet of Lul) have also been translated into English and German. Second, there are more than 270 surviving letters of Alcuin of York († 804), one of the chief advisors to Charlemagne and a notable scholar of his day whose reputation led to his writings being disseminated widely across England and the continent.³⁴ Third, some 59 scholarly letters survive of Rabanus Maurus, abbot of Fulda between 822 and 842 and archbishop of Mainz from 847 until his death in 856. Fourth, there are the letters of the Bavarian-born Abbot Lupus of Ferrières († ca 862), who was educated at Fulda. To these can be added numerous other letters of special interest for scholars of monastic history in the Germanic regions, such as the seventh-century letter of Aldhelm to King Geraint of Dumnonia urging the British church to accept the authority of Rome and Canterbury,³⁵ Bede's eighth-century letter to Bishop Ecgberht of York condemning the custom of monasteries founded and controlled by laymen,³⁶ the ninth-century appeal of the Fulda community to Charlemagne in which they petitioned him to remove their abusive abbot,³⁷ or the tenth-century letter of Ælfric to the monks of Eynsham on proper monastic observance.³⁸

Letters are especially valuable to the historian, for they offer a glimpse of directly contemporary circumstances with a frankness that one rarely finds in hagiography or narrative history. They were themselves, of course, often highly formulaic documents, written according to social and literary conventions, and were not impartially preserved: the bias, interests and objectives of those who inherited them were all factors in their transmission, as well as simple accidents of survival.³⁹ Yet they can be an invaluable contrast to our other sources, providing precious fragments of circumstantial detail and revealing some of the ambiguity and internal complexity of monastic life, which hagiographers, for instance, may have sought to obscure. It will be worthwhile considering some examples in more detail.

One of the most important sources for our purposes, the letters of Boniface and Lul, were compiled towards the end of the eighth century in Mainz, and survive primarily in three manuscripts.⁴⁰ The letters deal with a wide variety of subject matter. They include the correspondence of Boniface with four successive popes concerning matters of church orthodoxy, orthopraxy and governance, letters between the missionary community and Anglo-Saxon and Frankish ecclesiastics as well as several royal figures, pleas for practical and spiritual support, requests

34. See ALLOTT 1974.

35. Aldhelm of Malmesbury, *Epistola ad Geruntium*.

36. Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum episcopum*.

37. *Epistolæ Karolini aevi II*, ep. 33, p. 548-551.

38. Ælfric of Eynsham, *Epistula ad fratres*.

39. See GARRISON 1999.

40. Munich, Staatsbibliothek, Lat. 8112 (Mainz, s. VIII/IX); Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Rastatt 22 (Mainz, s. IX med.); Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Lat. 751 (Mainz, s. IX med.).

for advice on specific issues, and so on. Their value as a source which provides information on the mentality and tactics of early medieval missionaries cannot be overstated, and they also contain much useful information concerning contemporary monastic life east of the Rhine. One letter from Boniface, for example, stipulated how the monastery of Fritzlar, a small community, which existed on the very edge of the mission field, was to be organised following the death of its abbot. Rarely does an early medieval source give us quite so precise and intimate a glimpse of a monastic community in daily operation.

“I call upon your affection in fatherly love to maintain the order of your monastic life the more strictly now that our father Wigbert is gone. Let the priest Wigbert and the deacon Megingoz expound the rule to you. Let them have charge of the canonical hours and of the office of the Church. They are to give advice to the others, instruct the children, and preach the Word of God to the brethren. Let Hiedde be prior and rule the servants, and let Hunfrid assist him, if need be. Sturm will take charge of the kitchen. Bernhard is to be the labourer and will build our cells as needed. In all matters, wherever necessary, consult abbot Tatwin and do whatever he may direct”.⁴¹

Elsewhere Boniface informs Pope Zacharias of his new foundation of Fulda:

“There is a wooded place in the midst of a vast wilderness and at the center of the peoples to whom we are preaching. There we have placed a group of monks living under the rule of St Benedict, who are building a monastery. They are men of strict abstinence, who abstain from meat and wine and spirits, keeping no servants, but content with the labor of their own hands”.⁴²

The value of such sources in providing a mirror against which to regard conciliar rulings (to be discussed shortly) and hagiography is clear. In this case, for instance, we can see on the one hand how Fritzlar was not organised strictly according to the *Rule* of St Benedict,⁴³ but on the other that Boniface did indeed assert the Benedictine identity of Fulda from its very foundation in 744, putting into practice the command of the Frankish church councils of 742 and 743 (upon which he had great influence) that all monks should follow the *Rule* of St Benedict.⁴⁴ Another letter, meanwhile, reveals that Boniface himself could sometimes relax his own strict standards: it records how he sent two casks of wine to Archbishop Ecgbert of York in order that he might use them ‘for a merry day with the brethren’.⁴⁵

Whether Boniface’s efforts to reform Frankish monasticism according to the standards of St Benedict were successful beyond his own foundations, however, is another question. The letters also reveal the high level of resistance he met from certain Franks, both within and without the royal court. One particularly fraught issue was the scope of episcopal jurisdiction

41. Boniface, *Epistolæ*, 40, éd. TANGL, p. 65; trans. EMERTON, ep. XXX, p. 45-46.

42. Boniface, *Epistolæ*, 86, éd. TANGL, p. 193; trans. EMERTON, ep. LXX, p. 136-137.

43. HOLDSWORTH 1980, p. 60, notes that the executive offices outlined by Boniface in his letter to Fritzlar diverge from the *Rule* of St Benedict on certain points.

44. Boniface, *Epistolæ*, 56, éd. TANGL, p. 101; for the acts of the 742 and 743 councils, see *Concilia aevi Karolini*, 1, éd. WERMINGHOF, p. 2-4.

45. Boniface, *Epistolæ*, 91, éd. TANGL, p. 208; trans. EMERTON, ep. LXXV, p. 147.

over monasteries, which Boniface thought should be absolute (unless a community obtained a papal exemption, as did his own foundation of Fulda). The letters of Lul offer rare glimpses into the everyday problem of establishing and maintaining episcopal authority within a diocese. On one occasion Lul was forced to excommunicate an abbess for allowing two of her nuns—who had been veiled without his consent, as was canonically required—to leave the nunnery and fall into carnal vice. His anger rings clear in the letter:

“On account of this stupidity, know that you are excommunicated, along with all your people who sinned by having a part in this charge of neglect, until we are satisfied that you have made amends for this fault. You are not, however, to receive into your chapel those roaming and disobedient women named above; but they are to remain outside the monastery, excommunicated from the Church of Christ, doing penance, once they have returned, on bread and water; you are likewise to abstain from all meat and all drink sweetened by honey”.⁴⁶

If ensuring the competence and accountability of abbesses was difficult, it was no less problematic when priests chose to disregard episcopal authority. Another letter describes how Lul excommunicated a disobedient Anglo-Saxon priest near Hammelburg only for his ruling to be completely ignored; to make matters worse, the villain and his accomplice, also an Anglo-Saxon priest, proceeded to sell and steal the assets of the churches under their control, including cash, livestock, slaves and weaponry.⁴⁷ The dissent caused among the Fulda community by the harsh rule and ambitious building programme of Abbot Ratgar (802-817) was referred to by Candidus Bruun in his *Vitæ* of Eigil, as we saw above, and also led to a direct appeal to Charlemagne in 812. This appeal has been preserved in the letter form of the *Supplex Libellus*, a list of complaints against the abbot which is an important source for understanding Fulda's role in the reform movement of Benedict of Aniane.⁴⁸

Naturally such extreme instances as these should not be taken as typical of daily life within religious communities any more than hagiographical accounts should be taken at face value, but they do remind us of the inherent complexity involved in regulating male and female religious communities of diverse sizes, traditions and wealth, geographically scattered, whose connections to the secular world could vary greatly in nature and degree. Letters can also provide valuable background information to early medieval church councils, for at times they reveal how such councils were the end result of broad reform currents that crossed between Britain and the continent. We already alluded to Bede's 734 letter to Bishop Ecgberht of York, in which he lamented the breakdown of monastic discipline in Northumbria over the previous

46. Boniface, *Epistolæ* 128, éd. TANGL, p. 266: *Pro huius modi stultitia excommunicatam te esse scias cum omnibus tuis, qui hunc negligentiae reatum consentiendo perpetraverunt, usque dum digna satisfactione hanc emendetis culpam. Illas autem vagas et inoboedientes supradictas feminas intra cellam vestram non recipiatis; sed foras monasterium excommunicatæ ab ecclesia Christi sedeant penitentiam agentes, dum venerint, in pane et aqua; et vos similiter, abstinendo ab omni carne et ab omni potu, qui melle indolcoratur.*

47. Boniface, *Epistolæ*, 128, éd. TANGL, p. 110.

48. For the *Supplex Libellus*, see *Caroli Magni epistolæ*, 33, ed. DÜMMLER, p. 548-551. See also SEMMLER 1958 and BECHT-JÖRDENS 1992.

generation, clearly regarding this to be an episcopal matter;⁴⁹ his calls for a broad reform of monastic life under episcopal direction were echoed over a decade later in Boniface's letters to (by now) Archbishop Ecgberht and Archbishop Cuthbert of Canterbury.⁵⁰ The product of these currents in both Germania and England were a series of church councils in the 740s aimed at a general tightening of monastic discipline, as we shall now see.

3. CHURCH COUNCILS AND LEGISLATION

Church councils record the periodic attempts of church leadership, often acting in consort with secular rulers, to enforce standards of morality, practice, authority and belief on a diverse monastic landscape. Such promulgations of church law, which tended to be produced by the same broad circle as our hagiographical sources, must also be read with caution, both in respect of what they say and what they do not. They were intended, that is, to address matters, which were of particular concern to church leaders at the time of the council, but the degree to which their measures were successfully implemented is often a complex and difficult question. They can also tell us little of those aspects of religious life, which the councils did not consider in need of regulation or reformation.

There were church councils in England before the 740s, but they did not tend to address monastic matters. The earliest Anglo-Saxon church council to be recorded in any substance, the Council of Hertford in 672, essentially confirmed the canons of the Council of Chalcedon regarding the extent of episcopal governance and the discipline of the clergy. Its only reference to monks were the commands that they should not leave their monastery without the written permission of the abbot, and that they remain obedient.⁵¹ The Council of Hatfield in 680 was convened in order to formally reject the heresy of monothelitism, but again was not concerned with monks or monasteries.⁵²

East of the Rhine, meanwhile, there is no surviving record of a church council until 742, no doubt due to the fact that the region lacked an extensive episcopal landscape until the eighth century; the Frankish church still leaned heavily westwards towards the older Roman sees of the Rhineland, Neustria and southern Gaul, where councils had been held continually from the early sixth century.⁵³ This changed with Boniface's foundations of new bishoprics at Büraburg, Erfurt and Würzburg in 741 and Eichstätt by 745,⁵⁴ which effectively created a new metropolitan province of *Germania* of which he was archbishop (though without a fixed see until he received Mainz in 745). The so-called *Concilium Germanicum*, held at an unknown

49. Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum episcopum*, esp. cc. 11-14.

50. Boniface, *Epistolae*, 75 and 78, éd. TANGI, p. 156-158, 161-170.

51. The acts of the council are preserved in Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IV, 5. For further discussion of Anglo-Saxon church councils, see KEYNES 1986; CUBITT 1995.

52. Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, IV, 17.

53. *Concilia aevi Merovingici*.

54. Würzburg and Eichstätt endured, but Büraburg and Erfurt were demoted and incorporated into the see of Mainz ca 746.

location in 742 under the auspices of the *dux et princeps* Carloman, was attended by Boniface along with the bishops of Würzburg, Büraburg, Erfurt, Cologne and Strasbourg.⁵⁵ The first three of these bishops, along with the chorbishop (later bishop of Eichstätt) Willibald, were Boniface's men, while conspicuous by their absence are bishops Gewilip of Mainz and Milo of Trier, both devoted opponents of Boniface.

The *Concilium Germanicum* was, in other words, an excellent platform for Boniface to begin his reform programme with strong royal support. The council announced that it had dealt with corruption in the priesthood, banned religious from bearing arms or from marching with the army except as appointed chaplains, and forbidden them from hunting; it further insisted that bishops exercise canonical authority over all priests in their dioceses and suppress pagan customs among the wider population. It also addressed directly the question of monastic discipline, laying out a detailed penance for monks, priests or nuns who fell into carnal sin. It ends with this decree: "Let cloistered monks and maids of God live after the *Rule* of St Benedict and govern their lives accordingly."⁵⁶

This council was followed by a second at Estinnes, on the modern French-Belgian border, in March of 743, which was concerned primarily with the use of church land to support the Frankish army and repeated the condemnation of corrupt clergy and paganism. It also restated the primacy of the *Rule* of St Benedict in terms which, unlike in the previous council, perhaps imply that it was not already widespread: "Abbots and monks have accepted the *Rule* of the holy father, Benedict, for the reformation of the regular life."⁵⁷ This may illustrate the difference between Boniface's own mission field of central Germania and the Frankish heartlands of western Austrasia, which had an older and alternative monastic tradition in which the *Rule* of St Benedict did not figure so prominently. It is not to say, however, that the *Rule* of St Benedict was now made the exclusive and compulsory blueprint for all monasteries; as in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of the previous century, it was more important that the *Rule* simply be acknowledged as a common and pre-eminent standard, while still allowing for considerable variation between communities.⁵⁸

The letters of Boniface to Ecgbert of York and Cuthbert of Canterbury demonstrate how closely related were the reform movements on either side of the North Sea at this time.⁵⁹ The English equivalent of the *Concilium Germanicum* was the council held at the unidentified *Clofesho* in 747,⁶⁰ whose convenors, led by Cuthbert of Canterbury, had, according to John Blair, "become obsessed with the standards of monastic life".⁶¹ The council decreed that all monasteries were to be correctly governed and soberly organised according to the regular

55. Boniface, *Epistolæ*, 56; also *Concilium Germanicum* dans *Concilia aevi Karolini*, 1, éd. WERMINGHOF, p. 1-4.

56. Boniface, *Epistolæ*, 56, éd. TANGL, p. 101; trans. EMERTON, ep. XLIV, p. 71.

57. Boniface, *Epistolæ*, 56; éd. TANGL, p. 101; see also *Council of Estinnes* dans *Concilia aevi Karolini*, 1, éd. WERMINGHOF, p. 5-7.

58. See WORMALD 1976, p. 145; HOLDSWORTH 1980, p. 51; MCKITTERICK 1983, p. 110; DUNN 2000, p. 192-194; FOOT 2006, p. 50; YORKE 2006, p. 169.

59. The point has been often noted: see LEVISON 1946, p. 86; CUBITT 1995, p. 102-110; BLAIR 2006, p. 112; FOOT 2006, p. 58, n. 105.

60. See in particular CUBITT 1992; CUBITT 1995, p. 99-113.

61. BLAIR 2006, p. 113.

life, without the intrusion of secular distractions such as drink, music, feasting or fashionable clothes. Furthermore, the bishops took upon themselves the responsibility for enforcing these standards, ruling that every bishop was to be answerable for the quality of monastic communities in his diocese, and was to make frequent visitations to ensure that matters were kept in order. The extent to which these aims were attained (or attainable), particularly the true scope of episcopal power, is unclear.⁶²

The process of Frankish reform instigated by Boniface and Carloman in the 740s was continued and elaborated through the remainder of the eighth century and into the ninth, most especially under Charlemagne, and can be traced in the rich legislative sources from the period.⁶³ Especially important are Charlemagne's *Admonitio generalis* of 789 and the reform councils of 813, one of which was held at Mainz.⁶⁴ The culmination of this long process was the wide-ranging reform of Benedict of Aniane († 821), who worked in concert with Louis the Pious in order to impose a standard version of the *Rule* of St Benedict on all Carolingian monasteries.⁶⁵ The councils held at Aachen in 816 and 817 presented an ultimate distillation of the Carolingian monastic reform programme. Its impact east of the Rhine is best illustrated by the dispute in Fulda, mentioned above, during which the monks of the community appealed directly first to Charlemagne and then to Louis the Pious, who finally expelled Abbot Ratgar in 817.

The Anglo-Saxon church, particularly in the north and east of England, suffered greatly during the Viking invasions of the ninth century, and it is not until the following century that the state of the sources begins to recover. As mentioned above in relation to the hagiographical sources, they are dominated by texts associated with the Benedictine revival which was led by three churchmen: Archbishop Dunstan of Canterbury († 988), Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester († 984) and Oswald, bishop of Worcester and archbishop of York († 992). Between them they had strong ties to contemporary Cluniac and Lotharingian reform developments in northern Francia, in particular at Ghent and Fleury, which gave impetus and direction to a mood of monastic reform, which had been instigated by Alfred the Great († 899) and continued by his successors.⁶⁶ Aside from the hagiography, the main product of this movement was the *Regularis concordia Angliæ nationis monachorum sanctimonialiumque*, written between 965 and 975 with the aim of binding all English monastic houses to a common interpretation of the *Rule* of Benedict.⁶⁷

As with certain texts during the Carolingian reform movement, the *Regularis concordia* blurs the line between royal legislation and monastic *regula*. It was issued under royal author-

62. *Ibidem*, p. 113-117, expresses scepticism that Anglo-Saxon bishops were able to exercise as much authority as they clearly desired; SIMS-WILLIAMS 1990, esp. p. 139-140, and CUBITT 1995, p. 99-113, are more optimistic in this respect.

63. For a broad discussion, see LEVISON 1946, p. 94-131; SEMMLER 1965; MCKITTERICK 1983, p. 110-117; MCKITTERICK 2008, p. 306-315.

64. For the reform councils of 813, see *Concilia aevi Karolini*, 1, éd. WERMINGHOF, p. 245-306.

65. SEMMLER 1994; see also DIEM forthcoming. I am grateful to Albrecht Diem for access to his unpublished article.

66. MCKITTERICK 1983, p. 285; *Regularis concordia*, ed. SYMONS, p. XLIX-L.

67. *Regularis concordia*, ed. SYMONS; this edition also includes a useful discussion by Symons of the text and its background.

ity, and is prefaced by the statement that King Edgar, “in fulfillment of his royal office, even as the Good Shepherd [...] carefully rescued and defended from the savage open mouths of the wicked—as it were the gaping jaws of wolves—those sheep which by God’s grace he had diligently gathered together”.⁶⁸ Indeed, it promotes the intrusion of royal (though not aristocratic) authority into everyday monastic life to an extent not seen in any other early medieval monastic text. It also makes the telling observation that the *Rule* of St Benedict was already widely acknowledged as the essential basis of regular life, but that a council was convened “lest differing ways of observing the customs of one Rule and one country should bring their holy conversation into disrepute”.⁶⁹ This supports the idea that even universal adherence to the *Rule* of Benedict, enforced by royal decree, would not necessarily result in a uniform monastic landscape.

4. CHRONICLES AND ANNALS

Numerous other forms of sources can also have a direct or indirect bearing on our understanding of monastic life. By far the most important source for Anglo-Saxon England up to the early eighth century is Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*, completed in 731, a text which is fundamentally written from the perspective of a cloistered scholar.⁷⁰ Being a monk himself, the nature and regulation of monastic life were among Bede’s primary interests, and formed a major theme in both the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and his other surviving works. While hardly a disinterested observer of events, he was meticulous in his research and well informed on matters both secular and ecclesiastical, often stating the precise source of his information. This critical quality is especially valuable because his great historical account includes so much circumstantial information regarding the nature of monastic life in the century leading up to his own time. Less useful for monastic history, though still of value, is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, originally compiled in the late ninth century and continued in its various versions to the eleventh century or later.

The Frankish territories produced a far greater number and variety of chronicles and annals from individual authors and monastic houses than Anglo-Saxon England, several of which relate to the Germanic regions. For the Merovingian period the most important sources are Gregory of Tours and the *Chronicle of Fredegar* and its continuations, although they do not often stray very deep into Germania.⁷¹ From the mid eighth to late ninth century we have the *Royal Frankish Annals*,⁷² which run from 741 to 829, and their Austrasian continuation, the *Annals of Fulda*, running until 887.⁷³ Other annals of the seventh to ninth centuries include the *Annales Mettenses*, and the *Annales Laureshamenses*, while a valuable record of late Carolingian

68. *Ibidem*, p. 2.

69. *Ibidem*.

70. Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*.

71. Gregory of Tours, *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis libri historiarum X*; *Chronicarum quæ dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici*.

72. *Annales regni Francorum*.

73. *Annales Fuldenses*.

and Ottonian history is the *Chronicon* of Regino of Prüm, which continues up to 906. A dearth of sources from the early tenth century is succeeded by Widukind of Corvey's *Rerum gestarum Saxonicarum libri tres* (begun in the 960s and continued up to 973), and a continuation of Regino's *Chronicon* by Adalbert of Magdeburg to 967/8.⁷⁴

Chronicles and annals are often more interested in secular history, rarely entering monasteries except in the train of worldly events, such as with Regino's prosaic account of the sack of Prüm by Vikings in 892,⁷⁵ or Adalbert's remark that the Hungarian invasion of 915 reached as far as the monastery of Fulda.⁷⁶ In other cases they can offer valuable fragments of information, for example the incidental statement in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that the minster of Wimbourne, where St Leoba was raised and educated, was founded by King Ine's sister Cuthburg.⁷⁷ On occasion, the annalists might allude to monastic issues where they directly concern royal activity, as when the *Annales Laureshamenses* describe at length Charlemagne's summoning of the 802 Council of Aachen and its decree that all monks follow the *Rule* of St Benedict.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, even where annals have little specific to say regarding contemporary monasticism, they can provide a useful historical framework of the world within monastic communities existed.

The historian of early medieval monasticism is presented with a wide array of sources pertaining to the Germanic regions. One resounding impression of these texts is the highly dynamic nature of monastic life, from the wandering Irish and Anglo-Saxon monks of the conversion period to the increasingly established and institutionalised monastic landscapes of later centuries. Diversity, divergence and conflict were an integral part of this history; just as Janet Nelson said that we should speak not of 'the Carolingian church' but rather "the Carolingian churches",⁷⁹ so we must reckon with a multiplicity of competing monasticisms. We ought not to assume that monastic life between the seventh and tenth centuries was at any time a stable phenomenon, nor that it saw an inevitable evolution towards one form or another.

A central element of monastic history in the Germanic regions is the relationship between insular Anglo-Saxon monasticism and monasticism east of the Rhine. They became deeply entwined at an early stage thanks to the missionary impulse of Anglo-Saxon monks such as Willibrord, Boniface and their many disciples. Boniface in particular strove to establish a 'model' form of monasticism in Germania, according to which all monasteries existed within an episcopal framework—with the bishop, of course, himself trained as a monk. Fulda was founded as Boniface's ideal monastery, a place of spiritual purity and refuge, a base for preaching and pastoral care, enclosed against the secular world but not divorced from it.⁸⁰ His turbulent experience with reforming the Frankish Rhineland church fed back across the North Sea and inspired the Anglo-Saxon Council of Clofesho. The Carolingian current of reform continued

74. Adalbert of Magdeburg, *Continuatio Reginonis*.

75. Regino of Prüm, *Chronicon*, éd. KURZE, p. 138.

76. Adalbert of Magdeburg, *Continuatio Reginonis*, éd. KURZE, p. 155.

77. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, éd. BATELY, p. 34.

78. *Annales Laureshamenses*, éd. PERTZ, p. 39.

79. NELSON 1996, p. 146.

80. HOLDSWORTH 1980, p. 61-62.

into the ninth century through the efforts of such figures as Chrodegang of Metz, Charlemagne, Louis the Pious and Benedict of Aniane, although its impact on the Anglo-Saxon church after *Clofesho* was limited.⁸¹ Not until the tenth century, once England had begun to recover from the devastation of the Viking Wars, did Anglo-Saxon monastic life see a major revival, now powerfully influenced by such continental monastic centres as Cluny, Gorze, Ghent and Fleury.

It is true that by this time the *Rule* of St Benedict had come to be viewed as a sacred and definitive text in itself, the natural superior of all written rules, and thus to dominate perceptions of “true” monasticism among the orthodox elite.⁸² Yet its victory was never complete even in the hearts of the reformers who promoted it. The authors of the *Regularis concordia* left space for the accommodation of “traditional” English customs, which were technically unrelated to the *Rule* of St Benedict. “We have ordained,” they wrote, “that the goodly religious customs of this land, which we have learned from our fathers before us, be in no wise cast off but confirmed on all hands.”⁸³ The reformers also eagerly incorporated certain continental customs into the *Regularis concordia*; one such was the liturgical drama of extinguishing every candle in the church at the end of Nocturns on the last three days of Holy Week and having the choir sing the Kyrie in darkness, the aim being to illustrate the terror of darkness and the saving light of Christ. However, it was left to the discretion of the abbot as to whether or not he adopted this foreign custom.⁸⁴ Even the *Regularis concordia*, therefore, which was intended as a practical guide to ensure liturgical uniformity in the observation of a single monastic rule under a single king, acknowledged the importance of tradition and the value of a certain flexibility in daily monastic life.

81. *Regularis concordia*, ed. SYMONS, p. XLIX; LEVISON 1946, p. 104-106.

82. DIEM forthcoming.

83. *Regularis concordia*, III, 32 (trans. SYMONS, p. 30).

84. *Regularis concordia*, IV, 37.

